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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 001745

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS, DS/IP/SA
NSC FOR GREEN/DORMANDY
LONDON FOR POL-BELL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/30/2014

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [NP](#) [GON](#)

SUBJECT: NEPALI CONGRESS LEADER KOIRALA EXERTS POWER AFTER
RESTRICTED FROM ENTERING AIRPORT

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty, Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

SUMMARY

[¶](#)1. (U) On August 28, after Royal Nepal Army (RNA) personnel barred former Prime Minister and Nepali Congress Party President Girija Prasad Koirala from entering the domestic terminal of the Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA), a Nepali Congress-affiliated organization called a general closure (bandh) for Kathmandu Valley on August 29. The RNA explained that the security personnel at the airport were not informed about Koirala's visit and had been following standard procedures. The GON formed a five-member investigation committee to probe into this matter. The RNA and the government have apologized to Koirala. End Summary.

RNA STOPS NEPALI CONGRESS PRESIDENT AT THE AIRPORT

[¶](#)2. (U) On August 28, Koirala tried to catch a domestic flight to Bhairahawa to attend public meetings in the western districts of Rupandehi and Kapilbastu. After RNA personnel stopped Koirala at the TIA, the Nepali Congress Party (NCP) issued a press statement condemning the incident, and appealed to all Nepalese to peacefully and strongly protest against the incident, alleging that it violated the fundamental rights of the people. The NCP urged all democrats, political parties, human rights organizations, members of the business community and civil society to unite in favor of democracy and wage a strong agitation against regression, and called for a one-day bandh.

[¶](#)3. (U) Rajendra Thapa, spokesman at the RNA Directorate of Public Information, said that the security personnel stationed at the airport had not been informed about Koirala's visit. The RNA issued a press release on August 28th stating that the security guards at the airport had tried to stop a car speeding towards the car park, but it did not pay any heed and proceeded towards the domestic terminal building of TIA. According to the RNA, after the car stopped, a person rolled down the window and said that they were going towards the terminal but without mentioning who was in the car. After being denied access to the terminal, the car turned and departed. The RNA statement further said, if it has prior information, VIPs are escorted with due respect towards the terminal. The RNA apologized for the inconvenience caused to former Prime Minister Koirala.

[¶](#)4. (C) For security reasons, at the domestic terminal, all vehicles park at the parking lot and passengers walk to the terminal. However, vehicles carrying important persons are allowed to go up to the terminal provided that they have prior security clearance. Embassy sources said that Koirala's security detail had called ahead to give notice. RNA sources blame a private who may not have gotten the word; and when the private turned away, Koirala's car drove away.

GOVERNMENT APOLOGIZES AND OPENS INVESTIGATION

[¶](#)5. (C) Mohammad Mohsin, Minister for Information and Communications and government spokesperson told the local press that "it was unfortunate, and that the government would take up the incident with serious concern." On August 28, the GON formed a five-member committee headed by Medini Prasad Sharma, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, to probe into the incident. Mohsin told the Ambassador on August 31, "this a storm in a teacup."

[¶](#)6. (U) On August 29, the Nepal Student Union, a student wing of the NCP, called for the closure of the Kathmandu Valley. The protesting NCP workers burned tires at different places in the valley and vandalized dozens of vehicles. The NC activists also held rallies in Biratnagar, Birgunj, Bhairahawa, Rajbiraj, Kailali and Jhapa.

COMMENT

[¶](#)7. (C) The RNA made a mistake; by preventing a former fighter

for democracy from traveling inside the country to address a political rally, the RNA may have given Koirala the national jolt he needed to capture some positive press and prove he is still relevant to the system. NCP leader Koirala has already begun using the airport flub to reestablish his national leadership, which had been on the wane both within and outside his party. The bandh on August 29 showed Koirala can still energize the Nepali population if given sufficient ammunition.

¶8. (C) The timing of the NCP's action may also have a personal/political element to it. Later this week, the Supreme Court is expected to decide whether Koirala has to respond to a series of questions raised by the Commission for the Investigation for the Abuse of Authority (CIAA). Rather than appear before the CIAA to answer corruption charges, Koirala and several others brought a case before the Supreme Court to protect themselves from giving testimony. Koirala may try to use the "undemocratic" treatment at the airport as an example of the governmental authorities' mistreatment of him, and try to portray any Supreme Court decision against him in a similar light.

MORIARTY